

are about this. If it is not worth your time, then it is not worth it for the Senate to stop its action and its business.

The talking filibuster rule says if the majority of the Senators vote to go forward with the debate, but it does not hit the 60-vote level, then if you are the objector, stay on the floor. If it is important enough for you to stop the Senate, stay here or get an ally, a colleague, to stay with you to cover the floor because when you leave we are going to renew the request to go back to that measure. If it is not worth staying on the floor to object, then it is not worth stopping the business of the Senate.

I think that is pretty reasonable. Yes, I would say to the Senator from Kentucky, I would live by that rule in the minority, which would mean I would not object unless it really meant something, unless it were worth my time and the time of the Senate to stop that action.

That is what this is about. How mindless it has been to watch this Senate lurch from one cloture vote to another, from one filibuster to another, 386 times in the last 6 years. What a colossal waste of time and energy and talent.

I am one of those Senators who believes that I came here to debate and vote, even to vote on tough amendments. I think that is part of the job. I often quote a former Congressman and great friend of mine, Mike Synar from Oklahoma, who used to say: If you don't want to fight fires, don't be a firefighter; and if you don't want to vote on controversial issues, don't run for the Senate.

That is what this is about. I agree with him. But for goodness' sake, lurching from one tedious, mind-numbing filibuster to the next is no demonstration of the strength of this Constitution and the value of the Senate.

Yes, we need to change the rules. We need to change the rules so there is more accountability, so that those who would stop the Senate and force a filibuster would at least have the decency and courtesy to stay on the floor and state their case and not believe they can do this in absentia. That is what this is about. I think it is important.

I have a bill called the DREAM Act. Some people have heard of it. I introduced it 11 years ago, I say to the Presiding Officer. I think it is one of the most important things I have ever tried to do. But I have never passed it. I called it two or three times on the floor of the Senate. Every time I got a majority, every time I got a majority, always a bipartisan majority, but it never passed. Why? It was being filibustered. A Republican filibuster required 60 votes. So for 11 years literally millions of young people across the country have had their fate unresolved because of this Senate procedure.

I think at some point a majority of the Senate should speak on this issue and that should decide the law of the

land. The House passed it 3 years ago. We should pass it here too. The filibuster has stopped it over and over.

Let me make one more point. I see two of my colleagues on the Senate floor. The Senator from Kentucky came to the floor and talked about the deficit that we face and the issues that challenge us with the fiscal cliff. I see the Senator from Virginia. Senator WARNER and I have spent more time together in his office sitting around a bowl of popcorn with some Diet Cokes talking about this deficit and what we can do about it than I can even total. I have no idea of how many hundreds of hours we spent together in a bipartisan meeting, four Democratic Senators, four Republican Senators. We have tried to take the Simpson-Bowles Commission, on which I served, and their basic idea and turn it into an agreement that we can enact into a law to avoid the fiscal cliff.

We have come close. We have not closed the deal, I am sorry to say. We have come close. There is a feeling on both sides, as the Simpson-Bowles Commission said:

Everything should be on the table, revenue, taxes—I can say taxes; they can't say that on the other side of the aisle—revenue, taxes. That accounted for 40 percent of deficit reduction in Simpson-Bowles—40 percent. What we are talking about is making sure any deficit reduction package going forward has a substantial portion of revenue and taxes in it. But we cannot tax the wealthiest people in America and balance the budget. I know that is true. There have to be spending cuts. There also have to be changes in entitlement programs.

I happen to agree with the majority leader. Social Security does not add a penny to the deficit—not one penny. It is a separate trust fund. But it only has about 22 years of life left in it. That is pretty good by Washington standards, but we can do better.

I think many of us agree on a bipartisan basis we should make some small changes in Social Security today to guarantee it will be here for 50 years or 75 years. We can do that, but that is a separate debate. The debate on the fiscal cliff is about entitlement programs.

I watched some of my friends on the left, on the Democratic side, say: Don't touch the entitlement programs. They are ignoring the obvious. Medicare untouched, unchanged, unamended, runs out of money in 12 years. I plan on being around for 12 years. A lot of folks who are seniors do too, and a lot of folks who anticipate retirement expect it to be there beyond 12 years. We have to do something. To say we are not going to touch Medicare is to ignore the obvious.

I don't want to go the Paul Ryan voucher route, voucherizing it, making it so expensive seniors cannot pay for it. But if we do not put our best talents together and make Medicare a program that lasts more than 12 years, we are not meeting our obligation to the offices for which we ran.

The last point: Medicaid. What is Medicaid? Insurance, health insurance

for the poor. One out of three children in the State of Illinois, their only health insurance is Medicaid. For more than half of the births in Illinois the prenatal care and well-baby care is all paid for by Medicaid. But that is not the majority of what Medicaid is spent on in my State. Sixty percent is spent on the frail elderly and those with mental and physical disabilities who are in institutional settings and they are broke. They have Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid to keep them alive.

When the Paul Ryan budget suggested cutting 37 percent out of Medicaid, my question to him is, Which group are you going to cut, Paul? The children, the mothers having babies, or the frail elderly?

Yes, we have to look at this program and find ways to save money so it is there when we need it—and we do need it. That needs to be part of this discussion.

I was heartened over the weekend—I will close with this—on a television show with Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM of South Carolina who said publicly: Regardless of this Grover Norquist pledge, my pledge is to the people—I am paraphrasing—my pledge is to the people of America. We are going to solve this problem. We need more on both sides of the aisle to step up in that spirit to avoid this fiscal cliff. We can. With the President's leadership and the cooperation of the Speaker, we can get it done.

For 10 days not much has happened. There has been a big Thanksgiving break, a lot of turkey and stuffing, but now let's get back to business. We are back in session, House and Senate. Let's roll up our sleeves. Let's get it done. We can address this fiscal cliff and set up a plan with the President that is reasonable. We need to do that on a bipartisan basis.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COONS). Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, Senators are permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

THE SPORTSMEN'S ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. For the information of the Senate, the pending business is S. 3525, which the Senate is considering postcloture. The Senator from Virginia is recognized.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I will take a couple of brief moments. First, let me thank my friend, the Senator from Illinois. No one has spent more time and also, candidly, taken a more courageous position in these discussions around avoiding this fiscal cliff.